

National Association of State Boards of Education

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## ⊕ Deeper Learning in New Hampshire

By Sammi Plourde

**F**aculty at postsecondary institutions and employers have identified key skills they want to see in students and employees but often don't: the ability to work in teams, solve problems, and communicate well.<sup>1</sup> To promote the deeper learning that fosters such skills, K-12 education systems must integrate many school disciplines and activities. New Hampshire is demonstrating how such a systemic approach can work. Pillars of its efforts are competency-based standards, strong assessment and accountability, and educator support.

### COMPETENCY-BASED STANDARDS

According to New Hampshire's Department of Education, the state has 470 public K-12 schools with a total of 185,320 students. The state's high school graduation rate in 2013–14 was 88.6 percent, compared with 78.2 percent nationally. Sixty-two percent of the state's students who attend a four-year college graduate. Like many other states, New Hampshire has adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts/literature and mathematics. Yet the New Hampshire State Board of Education did not view CCSS adoption as sufficient. Consequently, the board adopted and supported the implementation of standards in other subjects, such as science and history, along with "work study practices," which include deeper learning skills.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel, the state board moved from using Carnegie Units of seat time to measure student learning toward a competency-based system by revising

its Minimum Standards for Public School Approval. The state defines student competencies as "student learning targets that represent key content-specific concepts, skills, and knowledge applied within or across different content domains."<sup>3</sup> Competency-based learning emphasizes teaching strategies that help students realize their strengths and overcome learning obstacles, and it lets students show mastery through practice in the workforce, for example.

### ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

To ensure that students are obtaining deeper learning skills and that schools are focused on measuring competencies rather than time in chairs, the state needed richer student assessments and a comprehensive accountability system for teachers, schools, and districts. The state is adding performance assessments in pilot programs in four districts and plans to implement them statewide. Then New Hampshire will have an array of options—both statewide common assessments (e.g., Smarter Balanced) and performance assessments (e.g., class projects or end-of-year theses)—to assess student achievement and progress.

Districts can also propose locally designed performance assessments for the state education agency's approval (box 1).<sup>4</sup> This combination of statewide summative tests, statewide performance assessments, and locally developed performance assessments allows the state to keep its education system accountable, improve instruction, and diagnose areas where more support is needed.

To ensure that locally designed performance assessments are rigorous, valid, reliably scored, and administered flexibly, the New Hampshire Department of Education partnered with the Center for Collaborative Education and the National Center for Improvement of Educational Assessment to align local and statewide standards. The partnership enabled the state to validate performance assessment tasks, guidelines, and rubrics for core competencies derived from their standards and provide districts technical criteria for local assessments.<sup>5</sup>

These assessments are only part of New Hampshire's proposed accountability system. Other measures used to evaluate schools and districts include annual student achievement and growth scores, student dropout rates, and college- and career-ready attainment. New Hampshire has developed networks of support for low-performing schools and districts that encompass

#### Box 1. Performance Assessment of Competency Education

Four districts are piloting a system of assessment that focuses on locally determined performance tasks to measure and monitor student learning. Under New Hampshire's Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) initiative, trend data rather than averages are reported on measured competencies, and student grades reflect competencies attained by the end of the learning experience. All districts participating in PACE use Smarter Balanced assessments at least once during each grade span but only to ensure that they are aligned with state standards.

high-performing schools and districts. The network strategy includes innovation networks, knowledge networks, and technical assistance networks. Innovation networks include selected districts receiving support to pilot new practices. Knowledge networks encourage information sharing. Technical assistance networks focus on continuous improvement. Under this system, accountability is not punitive but rather the means for collaboration and improvement.

## TEACHERS AND LEADERS

The state emphasizes strong accountability both for student achievement of 21st century skills and for development of quality teachers and leaders who can implement standards for these skills. A task force comprising state board and state education agency members, teachers, and experts designed the state's model for educator support and evaluation.<sup>6</sup> Task force members first described important arenas for effective teaching: teacher preparation, induction, and professional development. They recommended that teacher preparation programs emphasize a “learn by doing” approach in which academic content and practical classroom experiences are integrated through ongoing, supervised field experiences. Teacher preparation should include hands-on activities that mimic likely classroom scenarios and include reflection with veteran teachers. The task force also stressed the importance of induction to support deeper learning—specifically, peer mentoring.

New Hampshire's teacher mentoring programs aim to both help new teachers implement practices they have learned during their preparation programs and highlight effective teachers by assigning them to mentoring roles. The induction program also gives teachers opportunities for collaborative learning with other teachers, allowing them to reflect on shared experiences. Collaborative learning helps reduce teacher turnover and also forms the backbone of ongoing professional learning networks for veteran and newer teachers.<sup>7</sup>

The task force then reimagined its teacher evaluation system in order to align it with New Hampshire's educational philosophy. New Hampshire's model for educator evaluation includes five components: student performance and professional practices (modeled on the InTASC standards developed by the Council of Chief State Schools Officers), content knowledge, instructional practice,

and professional responsibility. The state supports the notion that quality teaching focuses on student achievement; therefore, evaluation should focus on developing quality teachers. Each educator evaluation includes yearly goal setting and reflection, a professional portfolio, classroom observations, student learning objectives, and student growth percentiles. The model supports struggling teachers by providing them with a directed professional growth plan with targeted mentoring, and it rewards exemplary teachers (e.g., with more responsibilities and monetary rewards). However, struggling teachers need support from school leaders. New Hampshire recognizes that school leadership is a key variable in teacher effectiveness. Thus accountability for principals is also part of the system.

New Hampshire defines effective principals as those who promote student success; advocate a nurturing school culture and staff professional growth; promote collaboration between families, the community, and schools; and respond to diverse community needs. Like teachers, principals are evaluated on professional practices and student outcomes. New Hampshire has eight standards for evaluation of principals: educational leadership, school culture and instructional programs, school management, school and community, integrity and ethics, social and cultural contexts, alignment of local district goals, and student growth.<sup>8</sup>

## AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF LEARNING

Brenda Willis, executive director of the New Hampshire Parent Teacher Association, describes the transformation of the New Hampshire system of learning: “I've seen so much positive change over the past 10 years. We have parents, teachers, administrators, and community members all working together for that one child. I want that for everyone.” New Hampshire has streamlined what is often disjointed in state education systems. In particular, the New Hampshire State Board of Education and Department of Education are linking schools, districts, and postsecondary systems to provide seamless transitions between education levels from early childhood through K-12. They are achieving these connections by creating partnerships, shared expectations, educator preparation on helping students with transitions, student mentorships,

### Box 2. New Hampshire Coalition for Business and Education

New Hampshire State Board of Education member Tom Raffio and Fred Kocher, president of the New Hampshire College and University Council, co-chair a coalition that supports seven education initiatives to help the state's students become college, career, and civic ready. One of these initiatives, the New Hampshire Scholars program, encourages students to take more rigorous courses to prepare for college, and the 10,000 Mentors program pairs business mentors with learners.

student internships in local businesses, and conversations about work competencies between the business community and education agencies (box 2). The goal is to ensure that students successfully navigate transitions between grade levels and between secondary and postsecondary education and the workforce.<sup>9</sup> Successful transitions are marked by clear expectations for students that build upon knowledge learned in each grade span.

Although the New Hampshire system is less disjointed than in the past, it is still flexible. The New Hampshire Department of Education encourages districts to pilot innovative ideas and give feedback on what works.

## CONCLUSION

New Hampshire's education policymakers have decided that the only way for their students to excel beyond high school graduation is to build a system that emphasizes 21st century knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The state has established strong expectations and the means for implementing them. In particular, success is measured through student growth and performance, the number of schools and districts that are competency-based, college persistence rates, explicit collaboration from early childhood to postsecondary, and postsecondary completion and employment. Through the adoption of new standards, a new assessment and accountability system, and teacher and leader support, New Hampshire is demonstrating that systemic change that can enable deeper learning is possible.

## RESOURCES

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## NOTES

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4. Poon and Carr, "Evolving Coherent Systems of Accountability."

5. New Hampshire Department of Education, "NH Performance Assessment Network," <http://www.education.nh.gov/assessment-systems/>.

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9. New Hampshire Department of Education, "New Hampshire: Our Story of Transformation."